

On and about Duxbury Bay

This is the second part in an ongoing series about life on Duxbury Bay. This week we look boating safety from harbormaster Don Beers' point of view.

By Debra Filcman
MPG Newspapers

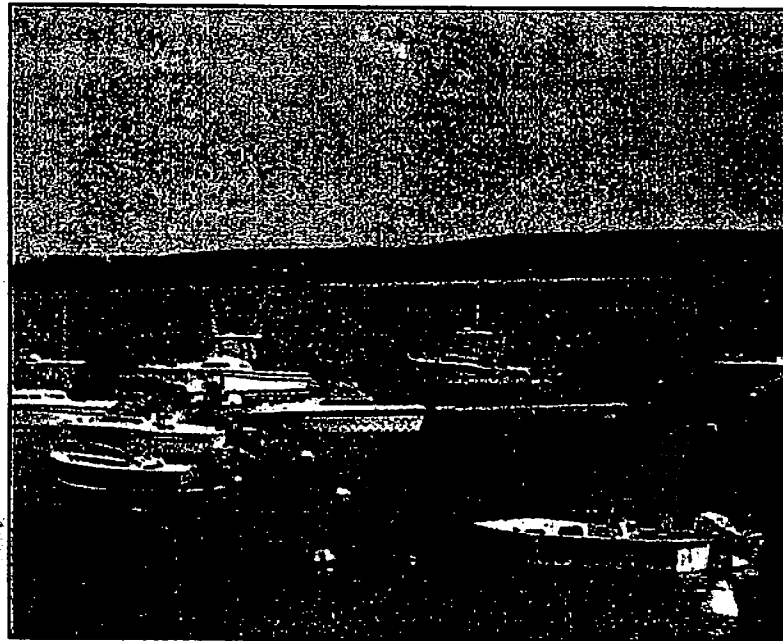
It's time for some favorite local pastimes to take a back seat for the summer: gliding across transparent patches of ice and competitive snow shoveling, for example, are through. Even watching warm vapors of breath appear in the cold air is (almost) so last season.

These activities are, however, quickly replaced as boats begin to reclaim their positions in the bay and bathing suits are brought out of the attic.

But harbormaster Don Beers warns that while the bay is there to be enjoyed, it's loaded with dangers for those who aren't cautious.

"This time of year, everyone is running toward the shore," Beers said. "Even the experienced are inexperienced after this long winter."

With residents and vacationers away from the water now for six or so months, especially while they



Staff photo/Susan Haney

Calm waters, for now — Spring at Snug Harbor signifies the beginning of the boating season. Harbormaster Don Beers offers tips to keep seagoers safe.

continue to work up to 80-hour weeks, Beers urges boaters to consider their own alertness and behaviors, weather conditions and the conditions of their boats.

At this point in the season, the water is still cold and hasn't warmed

or even below 50 degrees, which makes the water denser. Winds are strong and turbulent as they change in direction from northeast to southwest.

Jack Kent, Jr., Kent Harbor, and the

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Cold waters, lots of traffic in ocean

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rine agreed, saying that safety is the paramount concern.

"Whenever a new boat is delivered to customers, they are taught how to operate what they've purchased," Kent said.

Classes in boating safety are also offered by local organizations including the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and the Duxbury Bay Maritime School.

Kent, like Beers, also emphasizes the importance of making sure the boat's radio is in good working condition.

Cell phones might work as a backup, he said, but they cannot be relied upon, especially when you're further out in the water.

Boats are also equipped with flare kits in case of radio failure.

Other concerns include personal behavior of those operating the boats.

"We do have a job in law enforcement, but really, I see my job as a teacher, and second to that, as an ambassador," Beers said.

When people are issued tickets for not complying with the rules and regulations, Beers said, "It's because they were asking for one."

Typically, the rules are common sense. If, however, a boater is unaware, they'll often be issued a verbal warning and explanation of their violation. Tickets and fines are only issued as a last resort.

The most common violations, he said, are for speeding or operating in an unauthorized area too close to the beach.

Normally, wind is considered the enemy to those on the water, but



Staff photo/Susan Haney

Ready and waiting — Mooring balls are ready to go back in the water at Snug Harbor.

when dangerous wakes are created by fellow boaters, the harbormaster and his officers take action.

"My rule of thumb is that you should do whatever you want and have fun," Beers said. "But if you do anything that limits the access, right and activities of others in the bay, you will meet the harbormaster."

Beers, who has been harbormaster since the late 1970s, said the popularity of recreational boating has increased dramatically over the years. The bay is, he said, one of the only industries in Duxbury, and one the town plans to tend to.

"We have one of the best front yards anyone could ask for," Beers said. "It's supposed to be a great adventure, as long as you're careful."

The harbormaster suggests that boaters:

- Check the weather before heading for the water. The typical network news isn't specific enough about marine weather, Beers said. Nor is the weather channel. He recommends Channel 6 out of Rhode Island instead.

The harbormaster's office also posts the local marine weather conditions every three hours.

His point: Don't go out during rough weather systems.

- File a written or verbal float plan with the harbormaster's office before boarding the boat. Make sure someone on shore knows you're out there and what your return plans are. An officer will be checking to make sure the boater's car has cleared the lot by the end of their shift.

- Have the boat professionally checked before returning it to the water. Make sure all the equipment is working properly.

- Make sure your radio, in particular, is functional.

- Be sure to have a life jacket on board for every person in the boat. All of the harbormaster's crew wears one, he said. The top of their uniform is a float jacket.

- Make sure you're familiar with the waterways, rules and regulations.